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ABSTRACT

The monograph on individualized instruction focuses on the use of instructional objectives, instructional activities, instructional materials, and criterion referents. It is explained that objectives specify what the student should be able to do at the end of the instructional unit; the instructional activities and materials are the vehicles used to achieve the objectives; and the criterion referents measure whether the student has achieved the objectives. Stressed is the teacher's role in curriculum planning and knowing each student individually. (DB)

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INDIVIDUALIZATION

OF

INSTRUCTION

Notes

for the

Individual Instruction Lesson

in the

Instructional Technology Course for Teachers

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INDIVIDUALIZATION OF INSTRUCTION

Every student who enters the classroom brings unique learning capabilities with him. One may be strong in math but weak in reading. Another may have a whole set of underdeveloped skills. Still another may be generally advanced for his age. And the more individuals in the group, the greater the diversity becomes.

The teacher who is responsible for twenty or more students is faced with the perplexing and complex task of accommodating to the varying abilities and needs of each of the students in his class. He often uses a broad-based approach that aims at common denominators within the group.

What if the basic design of instruction could be changed so that the teacher would be able to devote more time to working with individual students? What if a learning environment could be created where each student learns what he needs to learn and doesn't have to sit through lessons which he has already had? What if a teacher could arrange instruction in such a way that he could develop a close working relationship with each student? This is the purpose behind individualization of instruction.

Individualization is an elusive concept much like the concepts of democracy and motherhood. Almost no one ever opposes the concept but if you try to get agreement you find yourself with many different definitions. Some understand individualization to mean one-to-one instruction but this is not necessarily the case. Many good teachers are able to individualize instruction even though they are working with a classroom of 30 or more students.

The use of technology is sometimes connected with individualization but there is no cause-effect relationship. Just because a child sits at a terminal or at a gadget where he pushes buttons, the instruction he receives is not necessarily individualized for that child. As a matter of fact, he is often exposed to a rigid curriculum. And "teacher-proof" educational programs are not individualization of instruction since no program can make the number of complex decisions which are necessary to individualize instruction.

For our purposes, individualization of instruction will be understood to mean the complex process of analyzing each student's learning style, potential and current achievement levels; designing learning objectives cooperatively with the student; providing instructional activities and materials which match the learning styles and objectives; evaluating progress based upon original goals, objectives and expectations. It consists of a total system of objectives, instructional activities, instructional materials and criterion referents. The objectives specify what the student should be able to do at the end of the instructional unit. The instructional activities and materials (including human resources) are the vehicles used to achieve the objectives. And the criterion referents (or evaluation procedures) measure whether the student has achieved the objectives. Since individual instruction is based on these four things, each bears a closer look.

Instructional objectives are the first component in the roadmap of individualized instruction. You have to know where you're going before

you start out. This involves the setting of objectives in such a way that you'll know when you've arrived. Therefore, the objectives are best stated in behavioral terms which can be measured at the end of the unit of instruction. For instance

"To understand the causes of the Civil War."

is not a good instructional objective because "understanding" is impossible to measure except through very specific behaviors. That objective would have been better stated as:

"To list at least five causes of the Civil War."

Perhaps an unjustified presumption is being made, but nevertheless it is made, that the starting point has already been located on the road-map of individualized instruction. The student's current academic achievement and his learning capabilities "locate" him somewhere on that roadmap in relation to the objectives to be reached. The exact route he will take to get to those objectives from his current location is represented by an almost unlimited variety of instructional activities. And since no two students are exactly alike, no two should travel exactly the same path. Therefore, no two students should be engaged in the same instructional activities all the time.



"...AND NOW, GENTLEMEN--MY GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT...
THE PERFECT PUPIL!"

This puts a serious demand on the teacher -- provide students with a wide variety of creative activities. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Teachers still spend the majority of their time lecturing. Statistics indicate that teachers spend 70% of their time talking. If they want to do something creative or exciting, they usually have a panel or a class discussion. For the most part, it is not a matter of not wanting to do something different but rather not having the time to sit down and think creatively about new types of instructional activities. Yet, this is precisely what needs to be done.

Once the teacher broadens the repertoire of instructional activities and different students are doing different things at the same time, the need for resources to support those activities increases dramatically. Whereas in the teacher-centered structure the teacher was the dominant resource, in an individualized instruction system instructional materials assume a major role in sustaining the instructional activities. They become the vehicles for traversing the route chosen to reach the objective.

Just as each student's starting point and capacities will indicate a set of instructional activities which might be unique to him, those same capabilities will indicate instructional materials which might be unique to him. For the student who is a poor reader, visual experiences might be indicated. For the gregarious student, peer learning activities. For the visually impaired, audiotaped instruction, and so on.

Whichever route is taken and whatever vehicles are employed, there should be checks throughout to ensure that progress is being made in the direction of the stated objectives. This is usually best accomplished

through teacher observation and recording of student activity and progress. These culminate in final evaluation procedures (based on the criterion referents stated at the outset of the unit) which, again, should vary for each student depending upon his capabilities and his and the teacher's expectations for him.

We probably understand the least about evaluation than any other component of the teaching-learning process. This is probably because we haven't asked ourselves, "What is the legitimate function of testing?" Within the context of individualization which we have set forth, testing should allow us to determine how a student is doing and either re-prescribe or terminate work in a particular area. It should also allow us to evaluate our own weaknesses and successes in teaching particular units of study. For instance, as students are tested and one does miserably, the teacher might say, "Look, let's try a different approach." Or, it is possible for the teacher to say, "Let's forget about the whole project and try something else for now." Or, a student might perform extremely well, in which case the teacher might say, "O.K., you don't have to do anything else in that area right now. Let's go on to something else."

Obviously, individualization of instruction demands new roles for learner and teacher. Perhaps for the first time, the learner is asked to play an active role in determining the objectives he is to achieve. He actively pursues the instructional activities. He sets his own pace, asks for help when he needs it, and decides when he is ready to be tested. In short, he plays an active role in the learning process -- accepts responsibility for his own learning.

The role of the teacher changes too. Because the students get much of

their information from sources other than the teacher, and assume more responsibility for their learning, the teacher has more time to work with each student individually -- to get acquainted with him, talk about his interests and opinions, encourage him to make the most of his learning capabilities. The teacher keeps track of each student -- how well he is progressing, when he should go on to a new assignment, which instructional materials best suit his learning style, which of his peers he works best with.

Individualization of instruction is a different way of looking at the learning process. And since the roles of the learner and teacher change, the classroom is bound to be affected. Some teachers express fear that the classroom will be chaotic and in fact it is often characterized by noise and movement, but they are usually appropriate and tolerable.

Individualization of instruction is an interesting theory, but does it actually work? Well, it is working in thousands of classrooms throughout the United States. In Hawaii, for instance, at least one classroom in every school in the state has implemented an individualized English program which employs peer learning and a high saturation of instructional materials. It is expected that this approach eventually will be adopted at every grade level in every school at least in the area of English.

Although many school systems are implementing individualization of instruction on a large scale similar to the Hawaii English program, there are also many which have successfully applied it on a small scale, sometimes within a single classroom. Usually, this effort is made by a small group of teachers working together to plan how individualization of instruction might be integrated into the existing traditional structure. Subjects which have

been especially adapted to this system range from reading and geography to science and mechanical drawing.

Individualization of instruction promises a step toward the realization of an ideal where each student can stop being just a member of a group and can take a giant step toward being himself, learning in his own way and at his own rate and according to his own ability. Each teacher can spend more time being a teacher, doing the things a teacher should do, using the creative talents that only a live warm human being possesses. The demands of the system are great -- students accept responsibility for their own learning, teachers invest much more time and psychic energy in curriculum planning and getting to know the students. But the rewards outweigh the demands in that the "system" of education is humanized and all are treated as individuals.

"Let Each Become All He Is Capable of Being"
State University of New York Motto